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INGERSOLL ANSWERED.

by ✓
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INGERSOLL ANSWERED.

COLONEL ROBERT G. INGERSOLL :

DEAR SIR :—You have said a great deal against religion, christianity, and the church ; and the mistake you make is in confusing the three. You condemn all religion, all christianity, and the whole church, and you use the three terms interchangeably as if each described the same idea as the others. This is the fallacy that runs through all your arguments. Those three words have very different meanings, and if we would understand either history or religion we must carefully distinguish between them.

Let us begin with religion. You believe it to be a delusion, an invention of man, a cruelty, a check on progress ; and when you say this I think you are confusing religion with the churches. The churches have often been cruel and wrong and a check on progress, and are the inventions of man. But a church is not religion ; a church is simply a human method of administering religion.

Consider religion separate from the churches. Is it not a fact of consciousness, a necessary part of mental structure, a law of nature ? Was there ever a nation or a tribe of men that had not a religion of some sort ? As far back as you can trace history you can trace religions. Brahminism, Buddhism, the Persian religion of Zoroaster and the wonderful religion of Egypt are doubtless familiar to your studies. All these faiths contained a belief in a God or

gods of some sort, in existence after death and in rewards for the good and punishments for the wicked. Of course they contained many other doctrines, some of them very foolish and some of them very cruel ; but they all contained, as a basis, belief in spiritual powers superior to man and belief in immortality. No matter what absurdities the course of years may add, immortality and spiritual powers form the ground-work of every religion. Neither the religion nor the absurdities could exist without the idea of immortality and a God. Men of science have of late years investigated the religious instincts of savages, and find them all believing in existence after death and in unseen spirits which govern the world. It is impossible to find a race of human beings that is destitute of religion.

Why is religion so universal ? Because every individual works it out from the great facts of life, and death, and his own consciousness. Every man is conscious of having a spirit ; something that can love, hate, remember, think, hope, and imagine, yet cannot be touched or seen, something which is independent of the body and independent of the body's death. You can talk about delusions and materialism as much as you please ; but every man from the savage to the sage has this innate consciousness of an immortal spirit, and will continue to have it in spite of all you say. The existence of this consciousness in all mankind is a fact which cannot be explained away any more than you can explain away the existence of the Rocky Mountains or the law of gravitation. It is a fact of our nature just as love, reason, and memory are facts of our nature.

There is another reason why religion is universal. All men believe in cause and effect. Our minds are so constituted that we must believe that everything has a cause. When, therefore, men look upon the universe and themselves, they cannot avoid the conclusion that there must have been a cause of all they see, and they worship that

cause as God. And when they see that they have a religious instinct which points to a God and immortality, they think that it must have been implanted in them for a reason, and that its intimations are probably true. There is no use in saying that it is impossible to be certain that there is a God, impossible to demonstrate His existence. The mass of mankind do not require certainty of knowledge. Probability is enough.

All religion rests on probability; and this is a point which you continually ignore. You demand that everything in religion should be made certain, demonstrated, proved beyond a reasonable doubt. This cannot be done, never has been done, and never will be done. The clergy and the churches, from the nature of their position and the demands made upon them, always profess that their particular form of belief is sure. But the words that they use belie their assertion. They constantly speak of religion as a faith, a hope; and religion is generally called a faith, a hope. Both of these words imply doubt. What we are sure of, we know. What we have doubt about, we hope for and have faith in. When we can see and touch a tree we do not say that we hope it is in existence, and that it is a tree, for we are sure that it is, we know that it is. But we may say that we hope to-morrow will be a clear day, or that we have faith that our friend who promised to join us will come. The fact that religion cannot be demonstrated, but that every advocate of it feels compelled to profess that he has demonstrated it, explains a great deal that is curious in theology. It certainly accounts for the endlessness as well as the bitterness of controversy; it shows how natural it is that sects should arise, and how necessary they are: and, if kept in mind, it should help to a more intelligent treatment of all questions of religion.

The probabilities favor religion. Men when left to themselves always build up a religion. Suppose all the religions

of the world to be forgotten, sweep away all memories of churches, priests and prayers ; take any ten men and start them afresh in the desert, and I venture to say that within a few years they will have evolved a religion from the facts of nature and their own consciousness. This religious instinct which is forever appearing in man is just as much a fact as light or heat, or the ground, or the trees. The metaphysicians certainly tell us that the religious instinct is part of every man's mind, part of the ideal side of our nature, and that every man is born with it. The religious instinct is as much a natural part of every man as his lungs ; and we are as likely to have a race of men without lungs, as a race of men without religion. Such a stupendous fact of nature cannot be dismissed by saying that it is a delusion, an invention of man.

Do you really object to this religious instinct? Do you really think it monstrous and wicked? Do you really think it interferes with liberty, and causes unhappiness? I grant you that men have made outrageous uses of it ; that they have built upon it churches which deserve all the indignation that your generous heart can feel and your powerful mind express. But let us distinguish between the thing itself and the abuse of it : between a fact of nature and the use made of it by man.

Whether you object to religion or not, it is here to stay. Neither you nor I, nor all the scientific investigation in the world, nor all the infidels and athiests can destroy it, or even materially lessen it. You can no more persuade the religious instinct out of men than you can persuade them not to breathe. When you fight against religion you are fighting against a fact which is as old as the human heart, and more steadfast than the hills. Indeed, the attacks on religion tend to develop and increase it. Doctrines or dogmas may be here and there overthrown, but in the end men are brought face to face with the great questions of life, death and a conscious spirit, and faith starts up

again as fresh as at the beginning. The way to convert an agnostic is to encourage his agnosticism. Let him run it through ; let him prove that nothing can be known ; that there is no God to worship, no future life to hope for, and let him face that situation for awhile and see how he likes it. The chances are that he will react.

There are few permanent agnostics. There never was a nation of agnostics, or a tribe of agnostics, or even a village of them. We find only individual agnostics here and there ; and very valuable critics they make ; they will not, I think, be damned for their lack of belief. But it is very difficult for an individual to hold to agnosticism all through his life. Sooner or later he begins to feel about for something positive ; some point on which to build a hope, and you yourself already show signs of this. Atheism and agnosticism are forms of growth, methods of study by which certain honest minds work out the one tremendous problem of the world. They also seem to be a contrivance of nature for getting rid of corruption, old skin, and useless horns. But the normal state of man is belief in a future life and worship of a God.

The clergymen who call you a monster and a destroyer of religion, have very little confidence in their faith. They should not be so easily scared ; for, with all respect for your ability, I believe you are as unable to injure religion as you are to injure the Mississippi river, or the stars. Statistics tell us that after seventy years of free thought and controversy in this country, the number of communicants of the churches has increased. They are more numerous in proportion to the population than they were seventy or eighty years ago.

Religion, in the sense in which we are now using the word, is a great good. How can you deny it? It is idealism; it lifts men out of themselves; it inspires them with enthusiasm, and it stimulates their morality. Here is another fact for us; for, like you, I love facts. Religion

undoubtedly has a great influence on morals. Is not this a fact established by general experience, and by your own? I agree with you that certain churches have often had a most disastrous effect on morals. But has religion, has belief in God and immortality ever had any injurious effect, and must it not, in the nature of things, have a good effect? Suppose you could really persuade people that there was no hereafter, would you not have cut away a large part of the incentive to morality? Set aside for the moment all doctrines and all the doings of churches, and consider that one idea of immortality, which is now so generally believed in Europe and America. Is it possible to deny that it is one of the best influences in our civilization? Take some of the other beliefs of religion, and consider them by themselves. Take the belief that certain sins will be punished eternally. This belief has been quite generally held among the nations of the best civilization; and do you mean to say that it has not stimulated the morals of that civilization? It may not be an altogether comforting belief; but it has held millions and millions of the wickedly disposed in check, given them the habit of morality, and, in that way, elevated the race. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the truth of eternal punishment cannot be demonstrated; suppose that the people who believe in it have only a probability, or a fear, if you please, to rest upon. Does that make the moral effect of the belief any the less efficacious?

And now as to that form of religion called christianity. You have fiercely attacked it; and again I think you have failed to make a distinction. You have failed to distinguish between christianity and the churches. I shall not now argue at length the truth of christianity as a revelation. I have neither the space nor the time for that. I wish simply to show you that there are influences in christianity which must not be confounded with the churches.

If you confined your abuse to the churches, I could, in great part, agree with you. Every educated man knows

that by the twelfth century the Church of Rome had become a mass of corruption and degrading superstition. Boys were made bishops, and priests went from corrupt women to administer the sacraments. The use of relics and the sale of indulgences had reached such a pass that the religion of Europe was largely fetishism. No man could safely think for himself, and thousands were burnt to death for expressing an honest thought. Political liberty was crushed. No discoveries could be made in science. Europe was dark and dead and immoral beyond anything of which we can conceive. This was what a powerful church had done. I can go farther with you, and say that many of the Protestant churches which struggled to reform this state of affairs also made mistakes, and that many of their actions can be defended neither in logic nor in morals.

But, granting all this, are there not other influences in christianity? Granting all the harm, all the folly and wrong that has been done by men calling themselves bishops, or priests, or popes, or ministers, or clergymen, are there not ideas and principles in christianity which have been of incalculable benefit to civilization? Noble ideas make their way side by side with evil ones; good and bad can exist at the same time, and in the same place and in the same person.

The way to test the question is to take the ancient world, before the Christian era, and compare it to the modern world.

Take the idea of the forgiveness of injuries, which is so well established with us that it is considered manly to forgive an injury. This doctrine was put into the world by the christians, and existed independently of all rottenness in the church. Previous to the christian era we find scarcely any traces of such an idea. The literature of the ancients teaches that vengeance is a sacred duty, and that forgiveness belongs to the weak and the cowardly.

Take the question of suicide. In the ancient world suicide was honorable ; it was considered creditable to use it as a relief from misfortune, or even as a relief from the monotony of life. Nowadays suicide is treated as a crime, and, unless I am very much mistaken, the modern aversion to suicide is the result of christian teaching. It is a decided advance in morals. The man who will not kill himself because he believes it right to live his life through and use its misfortunes to strengthen his spiritual nature, is, I take it, rather the superior of the ancient Roman.

Christianity, more than any other religion, has developed the idea of one God, perfect in justice, morality and truth. All the religions that preceded christianity had more or less of the idea of one God, but it was greatly obscured and often completely lost in a multitude of deities and idols. Christianity, or at any rate its churches, have sometimes gone astray in this respect, and smothered God in saints and images. But no one can deny that christianity is in the main a religion of one God.

All the religions that preceded christianity worshiped gods of more or less frailty, and often of positive immorality. Christians have also made the same mistake. The Calvinist used to worship a God who was arbitrary and vindictive, and damned and saved people according to His whim ; and the Romanists also worshipped a God who was arbitrary and vindictive and had created the Holy Inquisition to burn people when they would not believe a dogma they could not understand. But in the main, christianity has maintained the existence of one God, who is perfect in justice, truth and righteousness. And what must have been the effect on the civilization of Europe, of a perfect being held up for adoration and worship for nearly two thousand years ? Which is more likely to be the superior, the man who, together with his ancestors, has believed and had for his ideal half immoral deities, or the man who, together with his ancestors has had for his ideal one altogether righteous, God ?

No other religion of the world has equaled christianity in the systematic teaching of morality. What other religion has so effectively developed the art of preaching? Take the published sermons of Christendom, and leave out all those treating of doctrine; take only those which deal with morality, and tell me where in the ancient world, or where outside of Christendom you will find their equals. Take the sermons on morality we can hear every Sunday in the United States. Take the celebrated preachers. I have no doubt you heard Spurgeon when you were in London; and perhaps you heard Farrar, or Liddon, or Stanley, or Knox Little; doubtless you have read somewhat of Charles Kingsley and of Dr. Arnold's influence at Rugby, and of Thomas Hughes. Are you willing to say that all this influence is injurious? Take the preachers in this country one by one, from the greatest to the least, and in the case of each one answer the question, is his influence injurious or beneficial? In this way you will perhaps appreciate the practical working of christianity.

Are you willing to say that all the teaching of morality for the last thousand years has been without its effect on civilization? Is not the spiritual growth of mankind caused by this preaching just as much a fact as the check to progress caused by absurdity and conservatism in the churches, and is not the spiritual growth worth all it cost. We abolished slavery and saved the Union in this country by a frightful civil war. It would have been infinitely better if we could have avoided that war, the miseries of which cannot be numbered. But now that the war is a settled fact of the past, do we not say that liberty and union are worth all they cost.

There never was a religion or a philosophy, or a belief of any kind, that equaled christianity in the practice of morality, the doing of good work. No other religion has had an organization suitable for such work. No other religion has made such efforts to help the poor and ignorant

and elevate their thoughts and morals. No other religion has established such institutions of charity and philanthropy. What record have we of any work of this kind in the ancient world? What men in the ancient world ever devoted their lives to instructing and helping the poor, or had churches and organizations to enable them to teach righteousness to all sorts and conditions of men? Were the priests of Apollo or the Augurs, or the Vestal Virgins, or Socrates, or Epictetus ever charged with such efforts? What do we know of Roman hospitals, Roman orphan asylums, or homes for the helpless? It is in such works as these that the living force of christianity is shown, and not in the dry scholastic dogmas which you always single out for attack.

These works of charity which we see around us in every city of America and Europe are all the works of christians, and done in the name and under the inspiration of christianity. If christianity is a fraud, it is a most inspiring and valuable fraud. Agnostics often preach charity and philanthropy, but it is almost impossible to catch any of them in the act of practicing it. I know of no agnostic hospitals. I never saw an agnostic at work among the tenement houses; but I think I have seen some christians there, and when I have seen them I never could see that it made much difference whether they believed in total depravity, or in the Trinity, or in eternal punishment, or in the Jehovah of the Old Testament. I am free to say that they were not impelled to their work by any of these doctrines, and that if these doctrines comprised the whole of christianity, such men and such work would be unknown. Men of this sort and work of this sort are the result of the inspiration of the life and character of Christ, and of christianity as an idea and a feeling, a view of the subject which you seem utterly unable to apprehend,

I am persuaded that you cannot maintain the proposition, continually implied or stated in your articles and lectures,

that christianity has been nothing but an injury and a check to civilization. Did you ever consider the fact that the most progressive nations of the world are those that have adopted christianity? Wherever christianity in all forms is freely allowed, there we find the greatest progress. No nations are so intensely, so fully, and so thoroughly christian as America and England, and they lead the world in progress. Spain and Italy have a debased form of christianity which opposes freedom of thought and scientific progress, and they suffer accordingly. But even Spain and Italy are superior in point of progress to nations that have not adopted christianity at all. The civilization within Christendom is superior to any civilization outside of it, and superior to any civilization that preceded it.

Do not these facts outweigh the fact on which you insist so much that the Church of Rome was the enemy of science and at one time succeeded in checking all scientific investigation. The Church of Rome not only succeeded in abolishing science for the time, but also succeeded in dwarfing the human intellect, and in creating a reign of ignorance and despotism that has never been equaled; and doubtless, if they had a chance, the ecclesiastics of that church would do the same thing to-day. But granting all this, and granting that it was done by men who called themselves christians, let me ask who reformed this state of affairs. Unless history is altogether wrong, it was done in the period of time called the Reformation and done by christians, in the name of christianity. The main ideas of the Reformation were the right of private judgment and a return to the simplicity of the early church. Political liberty was developed at the same time; it was bound up with the idea of religious liberty, so that in studying the history of the Reformation in England, it is sometimes hard to distinguish between the two. The christians of the Reformation gradually worked out for us that liberty of thought and speech, that liberty of the press, and those

ideas of free government and free suffrage which you as a lawyer know so well. If christianity has gone astray it has also been able to reform itself.

Again I remind you that the advance accomplished by christianity is just as much a fact as the corruption and cruelty of the churches or their absurdity in doctrine and dogma. You ignore one fact and state the other. I ask that both of them be stated.

I ask you also if it is not a fact that christianity has in general softened manners and passions, and made men more humane than they were before the christian era; and I ask you if it is not a fact that the modern system of marriage is to be credited to christianity.

In the Roman Empire the ancient custom still prevailed of exposing to death children who were not wanted or who were considered feeble. We know that the christians opposed this custom and finally eradicated it, and we know that they opposed other barbarisms of that age and suffered for their opposition. In the dark years after the destruction of the Roman Empire, Europe was half savage, and was governed by the feudal system, which was a species of anarchy, and took for granted that every man was a murderer and a robber, and that every neighborhood was at war. We know to what a pass assassination had come. But is it not a fact that christianity was the mitigating influence of that period. True it is that popes and bishops were sometimes the worst assassins of all, that they cut out the tongues of their rivals and blinded them, and made the title of their office another name for immorality. But is it not a fact, attested and admitted in every history ever written, that christians opposed these evils, that in spite of the wickedness of ecclesiastics, christianity was on the whole the civilizing influence of the time, and that the church, though bigoted, intolerant, and cruel, was continually declaring for a day, or a series of days, what was called a truce of God, a time when all quarrels were off, and men were persuaded not to kill.

The law of one husband and one wife was well known to the ancient world, but the enforcement of it was defective. In the Roman Empire the marriage ceremonies were neglected ; the two people simply went and lived with each other. Divorce was equally easy and practically free ; it could be obtained whenever it was wanted. But it is needless to describe this state of affairs and the consequent corruption ; for we have all read it in Gibbon. He was no great friend of christianity ; but, nevertheless, he says, "The dignity of marriage was restored by the christians." And on another page he says, "The christian princes were the first who specified the just causes of divorce." It is to christianity that we owe the refining influences and the safeguards which now surround family life, and make it the best influence in our civilization.

This great fact of the elevation of marriage cannot be affected by such a passage as the following from one of your articles:

"So with the institution of polygamy. If anything on earth is immoral, that is. If there is anything calculated to destroy home, to do away with human love, to blot out the idea of family life, to cover the hearthstone with serpents, it is the institution of polygamy. The Jehovah of the Old Testament was a believer in that institution."

The above passage is part of some remarks made by you on the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible. You say that christians maintain that the morality of the Bible is inspired, and then you cite the slavery, the cruel wars of extermination, and the polygamy of the Old Testament, to show that the morality cannot be inspired. This is hardly an accurate way of treating the question of inspiration. There are several theories of inspiration of the scriptures. Plenary inspiration holds that every word has some sort of inspired meaning, and the doctrine of inspiration held by a great many is that the Bible is inspired only in a general way, as a guide, an example or a warning. Between these

two extremes are several other theories. I know not which one you intend to attack; but none of them, so far as I know, holds that either polygamy or cruel wars of extermination are inspired, or to be imitated. Many of the theories of inspiration may be irrational; but, if you intend to attack them, I think you are bound to state them accurately and fairly.

As to slavery, about which you say so much, it is true that it is countenanced in the Bible and has been countenanced and upheld by christians; and christians have countenanced and upheld other things that are wrong. They never claim to be perfect. But I call your attention to the fact that the slavery that existed in the Roman Empire was gradually abolished by the christians, and that afterwards, when negro slavery arose, the first regular opponents of it in this country were the sect of christians called Quakers; and that the abolition of slavery, both in England and in America, was advocated by christians, and in many instances demanded in the name of christianity. Whether Christ permitted slavery or not, it is undoubtedly contrary to the spirit of His teachings. I grant you that priests and professional religionists were often opposed to the abolition of slavery. They are apt to oppose any sort of change.

But the point to which I want chiefly to call attention in the passage I have quoted is this. Let us leave dogmas and doctrines, and stick to the great facts of christianity. What difference does it make if the religion of the Jews taught polygamy, when it is a notorious fact that christianity has always taught just the contrary? The Jews themselves had given up polygamy before the time of Christ. And what difference does it make if many christians have believed in the God of the Jews, or thought they believed in Him, when they have never adopted His supposed views on polygamy?

You will reply, "Then christians are inconsistent and absurd."

I grant you that. Religion is full of inconsistency and absurdity ; and so is political government, and law and medicine, and everything else that is world-wide in its application, and has absorbed the interest and passions of men ever since the dawn of consciousness. Let us be practical and sensible about these things. Let us not take an error more than two thousand years old and apply it to modern christianity, and then by our silence imply that christianity consists of nothing but such errors. You cannot judge of a great system by its mistakes alone. The American constitution and government are a great blessing; but if we should set out all their errors, and keep silent about the rest, they would not appear like a blessing; and they would contain more errors than we can now see if they were as old as christianity.

Of course, there has been a great deal of wild and ridiculous preaching among christians. But the accomplished benefits of christianity cannot be affected by it. The accomplished benefits cannot be affected by saying that the Roman Church burned to death thousands and thousands of upright men and women, nor by saying that Protestant churches have burned people, nor by saying that Calvin burned Servetus because he said that God was everywhere, and existed even in the pavement on which he stamped his foot. These persecutions are facts, without doubt, and no language can describe their atrocity; but when they are mentioned I ask to have the merits of christianity placed beside them. Let us have two columns, if you will, and in the one put all the error and evil and all the ridiculous doctrines, stated in the strongest language, and in the other put all the merits, stated also in vigorous language, and I am willing to stand by the result.

Christianity, you must remember, is a source, an influence, a power. It consists of a set of ideas and feelings. These have made their way through the world side by side with all the absurdity and wickedness of the churches. I

grant you that if ecclesiastics had their way there would be very few of these principles left. They would be smothered in arrogance, ambition, ritual, and cant. But since the establishment of liberty of conscience and thought, and the division of Christendom into sects, this danger has been very much lessened. The more liberty men have the more truly religious they will be.

You insist upon taking the past misdeeds of the churches, some of them five hundred years old, and applying them to the present ; you take the absurdities of one sect of christians and apply them to all sects. Is this an accurate way of reasoning ? Is it logical ? The only fair way of treating such questions, is to consider each error in its own time, and place, and church. If you are considering the religious folly of the twelfth century, keep it there and set over against it the religious wisdom of that century, and show how religious thought has advanced and improved since that day. Apply, if you like, the Darwinian theory to religion : show that religion is an evolution. That is a fair method. But you must keep all the links in their places and in chronological order. You must not confuse the mollusk with the monkey, or the monkey with the man ; neither should you abuse the mollusk because he is not a monkey, nor the monkey because he is not a man. If you are considering the old Presbyterian belief in predestination, which you dislike so much, keep it where it belongs, and do not charge it on all christians or on the Church of England, or the Wesleyan Methodists, or any other religious body which has expressly and explicitly repudiated it. It is impossible to get an intelligent idea of history if you mix up the past with the present, and the ideas of one country and one set of people with those of all the others. But that is just what you do with religion, and religion forms a large part of history and cannot be understood unless studied with historical accuracy. Your method of intermingling all the centuries and sects of Christendom leads only to confusion of thought.

If you want to attack modern christianity, attack it as it exists in modern times. From my reading of your articles I judge that you are not very familiar with modern christianity. Your mind seems to be entirely with the past and its mistakes. If you should keep your mind entirely with the past of science, you would find it full of mistakes. It is only a few hundred years since men of science believed that the baser metals could be turned into gold and silver, and that there existed such a thing as the elixir of life. Only two hundred years ago the phlogiston theory was generally accepted. That theory maintained that all combustible bodies contained an element called phlogiston, and that combustion consisted in getting rid of it. Even Priestly believed in phlogiston.

There are in this country more than a hundred thousand congregations of christians, comprised in twenty or thirty sects, and including at least forty million people that meet every Sunday for the sake of religion. Now do you mean to say that all of this preaching and worship every Sunday is absurd, and wrong, and injurious? I have heard sermons from nearly all the principal sects, and I must say I have heard very little absurdity. I have never yet heard a sermon on predestination or total depravity, or any sermon which made God appear ridiculous, and I think those doctrines are now very seldom preached. I have heard very few doctrinal sermons based on old errors or superstitions. But I have heard multitudes of sermons teaching excellent morality, stimulating thought and holding out high ideals of life, and you would have the same experience if you would take the trouble to study christianity as it now exists, and not as it existed eight hundred years ago. The christianity described in your articles cannot be found in modern churches. Most of the doctrines which you attack have to be read about in books; they are no longer heard from the lips of the living.

If you would prove your case that christianity is an in-

jury and a check on human happiness and progress, you must show that what goes on in the churches every Sunday is positively injurious. But you cannot do that ; you cannot show that the hundreth part of it is injurious.

And now let me give some passages from your writings, which I think are samples of the way in which you reason about religion.

First, as to your use of the word church. I object to the use of that word in this connection, as in the phrase Christian Church. The various sects of christianity cannot be ranked in one church. They differ too much. The use of the word church leads to vagueness, and some of your most glittering generalities are based on it. For example, you attack with great fierceness the doctrine of total depravity, in order to show the absurdity of what you call the church, which you quietly assume to be synonymous with christianity. You say :

“For many centuries the church has insisted that man is totally depraved, that he is naturally wicked, that all of his natural desires are contrary to the will of God.”

Now total depravity has never been the belief of all the churches. The Church of England has never believed in it, neither have the Unitarians, nor the Universalists, nor the Quakers, nor the Roman Catholics. Christianity is therefore not dependent on that doctrine. When you strike it out you are not striking out an elementary principle or foundation stone. The Calvinists are the only people who have ever believed in total depravity ; it was part of the foundation of their belief in the doctrine of predestination and election. But even Calvinists are now beginning to doubt it. The only general belief among christians which approaches anywhere near total depravity is, that every man is more or less inclined to evil, and needs the assistance of a power outside of himself. Some churches have always held this belief. It does not mean that man is utterly corrupt and cannot even do a good action, which is not also a

a sin, as the Calvinists used to say. It simply recognizes the fact that every man has certain tendencies to evil, a fact which no one in his senses will deny.

This tendency to evil is the basis of the doctrine of the atonement. You have spoken of that doctrine with great contempt, and, as if it depended entirely for its support on the story of Adam and Eve and their fall. After remarking that Adam and Eve are myths, and the account of creation given in Genesis absurd, you say :

“The Church cannot give up the story of the Garden of Eden—the serpent—the fall and the expulsion ; these must be defended, because they are vital. Without these absurdities the system known as christianity cannot exist. Without the fall the atonement is a *non sequitur*.”

The doctrine of the atonement may have often been based upon the story of Adam and the fall, but I think you are mistaken in supposing that story to be vital to it. You may cut the story away and banish the memory of it if you please, and I think the doctrine will still live. Atonement is an idea which is very wide-spread in nearly all religions. It is not based on any myth or fable ; it is based on human consciousness. Every man is conscious of evil tendencies, and of his own weakness in resisting them, and he usually believes in the existence of a great and righteous spirit with whom he can be united only by righteousness ; he feels unable to reach such a deity alone ; he dreads the effect of past sin, and, therefore, he has faith in an Atonement, something which will remove the effect of sin and put him at one with God.

I have great admiration for your power of concise statement ; but I really do not think you can dispose of the doctrine of the atonement in a short paragraph of less than fifty words. If you will examine the history of that doctrine you will find that Christians hold three or four different views on it, that besides these three or four main views, every sect has a variation of its own, and that they can all be

based on the simple fact of man's inclination to sin, without resorting to the story of the fall or to total depravity. Looked at from a philosophical point of view, it is more likely that the story of the fall arose out of the consciousness of sin, and the necessity felt for an atonement, than that the atonement is dependent on the story of the fall.

You object to the doctrine of the atonement, because you say it holds that Christ died for the sins of the whole world, and you say it is foolish to suppose that a just God would require the innocent to suffer for the guilty. Well, there are christians who agree with you on that point. They say, God could not have intended the innocent to suffer for the guilty, and accordingly they work out the doctrine of the atonement in another way. Christianity is, I think, a larger subject than you suppose.

In the paragraph above quoted, in speaking of Adam and Eve, the serpent and the fall, you say, "Without these absurdities, the system known as christianity cannot exist." This is another specimen of your way of reasoning. From a single point, you at one bound draw a conclusion that fills the whole horizon. How any one at all familiar with the history or actual condition of christianity can say that it is dependent for its existence on the story of Adam and Eve, is beyond me to conceive. Do you suppose that christianity spread over Europe and America by virtue of that story? Do you suppose that christian morality, and christian feeling, and christian rules of conduct, are dependent on that story? Do you suppose that men devote their lives to propagating the ideas of christianity because they are inspired by that story? No; the mainspring of christianity, the gist of christianity, the motive power of christianity, consists not in stories or absurdities, or dogmas or doctrines. It consists in the life and words and example of Christ. Have what opinion you will of the nature of Christ. Believe with some that He was only a man, or with others that He was the Son of God, or with

others that He was an inspired man, a man with more of the divine than any one before or since; have any theory you please; but there is no denying the fact of His leadership, the fact that He put into the world greater ideas than were known before, the fact that His name sustains christianity to this day. It makes no difference what churches or priests have done, it makes no difference that the history of the churches is full of superstition, humbug and cruelty; it makes no difference that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is arbitrary and vindictive, an upholder of slavery and polygamy, an abettor of murder, robbery and meanness; it makes no difference that the Puritans and Presbyterians believed in fatalism and total depravity, or that people still believe the story of Adam and Eve, or believe that the sun stood still for Joshua, or that the world was made in six days, or that none but Christians can be saved, or that the pope or any church is infallible, or anything else that is impossible, unreasonable or foolish. It makes no difference that the Church of Rome persecuted men of science and attempted to dwarf the human intellect, and is still opposed to free inquiry, free speech and free government, or that some Protestant churches have opposed by argument the progress of science. All such things as these which compose your indictment against christianity I am perfectly willing to let stand and admit, for they cannot alter the fact of what has been accomplished for civilization simply by the knowledge of the character, life and words of Christ.

If Christianity depended for its life on the doctrines of the Trinity, total depravity, inspiration of the bible, fall of man, and others which you are fond of attacking, I grant you that it would not live long. But I am surprised that you do not see that christianity as it exists in every-day life, in deeds of charity, in hospitals, in care of the poor, in married life, in self control, in temperance, in refined morality, is not the result of these doctrines. Christianity is spiritual; it spread, not by doctrines and dogmas, but

from man to man, from conscience to conscience, in the workshop, in the market place, by inward satisfaction and experience of its benefits. The doctrine of the Trinity, which is so prominent, and which you so much dislike, is not essential to christianity. It was never heard of until the fourth century. Christianity existed without it, and flourished abundantly, for four hundred years. So, also, of the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible. The books contained in the Bible were not collected together until the third century, and it was not decided until then what documents were inspired and what were not. Remember that when you deal with christianity you are dealing with a feeling, an inspiration, an idea, and an example, which, as a matter of fact, we can see to be a stupendous influence, but which cannot be put into a statement or code.

Doctrines, dogmas and churches are attempts to express certain opinions about christianity, either for the sake of discipline and organization, or for the sake of policy and convenience, and sometimes for the sake of ambition and pride.

Christianity cannot be reduced to a logical system, perfect in all its parts, and likely to perish if some of the parts are torn away. Christianity is a spiritual influence; you cannot kill it by cutting off an arm or a leg. The numerous sects, the strange, conflicting doctrines, and yet the steady persistence of certain main ideas through them all, show what christianity is. The frightful results which come from any attempt to hold people to any one opinion about christianity also show what it is.

You have devoted one of your articles to proving that christianity is a "divided household of faith" as if that was an argument against it. You might have stated the case a great deal stronger. Not only have christians changed their opinions in the course of centuries; but at the present time they are divided into sects, each one of which is opposed to all the others; and if you examine some

of the sects closely, you will often find it difficult to get two people to agree on the doctrine of the sect to which they both belong. The Church of England contains and allows almost every form of opinion from what practically borders on unitarianism to high church ritualism bordering on the superstitions of Rome. The Methodists, the largest sect in the United States are divided into several sub-sects. The Whitefield Methodists believe in predestination and election, the Wesleyan Methodists believe in free will. The Baptists are also divided into four or five sub-sects ; some are for predestination, others for free will, and so on. The Roman Catholics who make the greatest efforts at unity and uniformity, have nevertheless constantly changed, and always contained divisions and differences. Only lately they were divided into two parties, the Ultramontanes and the Gallicans, who opposed each other on two vital questions, whether infallibility rested in the Pope or in the ecumenical council, and whether the church was superior to the state or subject to it. There is no unity of doctrine or discipline among christians, and yet each denomination claims it. Now if christianity depended on doctrine or consistent opinion, as you suppose, how could it live and flourish in such a state of affairs? Churches and sects are necessary and will always exist, for there must be some practical method of administering religion. But christianity laughs at churches and dogmas, and moves through them as a steamer cuts her way against the wind and through the multitudinous seas.

I could easily fill this pamphlet with instances of the way in which you jump to enormous conclusions, state a part of a system so as to condemn the whole, and of the strange language in which you describe christian belief. But I shall cite only one more passage. You say:

“Christianity teaches not simply the immortality of the soul—not simply the immortality of joy—but it teaches the immortality of pain, the eternity of sorrow. It insists

that evil, that wickedness, that immorality, and that every form of vice are and must be perpetuated forever. It believes in immortal convicts, in eternal imprisonment, and in a world of unending pain. It has a serpent for every breast and a curse for nearly every soul. This doctrine is called the dearest hope of the human heart, and he who attacks it is denounced as the most infamous of men."

In this passage you are aiming at the doctrine of eternal punishment. But when and where, pray, did any christian ever assert "that evil, that wickedness, that immorality, and that every form of vice are and must be perpetuated forever." The doctrine of eternal punishment asserts that certain people who will not repent and reform, will in all probability be punished forever; but that is not asserting that "every form of vice" and wickedness must be perpetuated forever. This is a specimen of the twists of language you employ.

At the conclusion of the passage you say, "This doctrine is called the dearest hope of the human heart." Now, I would like to know, when any christian, or when anybody but you, ever called the doctrine of eternal punishment the dearest hope of the human heart. The christian's hope of being saved, if he leads an upright life, has often been called the dearest hope of the human heart, and your taking of this idea and twisting it into the doctrine of eternal punishment, is certainly a most remarkable stratagem. A little further on you do the same thing again, and speak of "the *hope* of eternal pain and the *consolation* of perdition."

You say in the conclusion of the above passage that he who attacks this doctrine of eternal punishment "is denounced as the most infamous of men." That assertion is not, I think, in accordance with fact. There are thousands of christians who do not believe in eternal punishment. Tillotson and Burnet were against it in England, more than two hundred years ago; the Lollards, Albiginse and

Waldenses were opposed to it ; and it is even said that there are passages in the writings of Origen and Chrysostom which imply a denial of it.

Many Christians believe, just as you do, that men will be punished for their sins and in exact proportion to the degree of guilt, but not eternally. They will be punished till the evil taint is destroyed and not for the sake of vengeance. Farrar, one of the most distinguished divines now in the Church of England, has written one or more books and preached numerous sermons against the idea of eternal punishment, and yet he holds high honor and position in his native country, is loved and respected, and when he came to America, members of all sects flocked to hear him lecture. He is the most powerful opponent of eternal punishment in the world, and yet I never heard him "denounced as the most infamous of men." Really I think you ought to find out what christianity is before you begin to attack it.

I have written in the hope of getting this subject out of some of the confusion into which you have hit it with your reckless and random blows. The keenness and vigor of your mind are, I think, misused. You employ them too much in distortion and caricature. I am not one of those who go about saying that they wish you were dead, nor do I think you are wicked because you ridicule religion. If religion cannot stand ridicule, the sooner we are rid of it the better. But remember that anything can be made to appear ridiculous if held upside down. Washington, or Lincoln, or Emerson, or Milton, or Shakespeare, or any of the great and good would look very ridiculous if held in the air by their heels. If you want to attack christianity, I ask that you attack it regularly and in order, and I will show you what I mean by an orderly attack.

Begin with christianity as a revelation. The central point of christianity as a revelation is the divinity of Christ, and this point is altogether a question of fact to be proved

by evidence, or to be abandoned if the evidence is insufficient. We have the testimony of christians who were contemporaneous with Christ, and their statements are handed down to us in certain documents. They say that they heard him assert that he was divine, saw him perform miracles, and they also say that he rose from the dead and appeared again on earth. The important part is of course the resurrection from the dead. If that can be proved the rest of the divinity will follow easily enough. Attack this point if you like ; show that all the facts alleged in support of divinity are very unlikely to have happened, that the witnesses are unreliable, that the documents in which their testimony is transmitted are open to suspicion. But do not let the question be confused with polygamy among the Jews, or with the character of the Jewish Jehovah, or with what the churches did hundreds of years afterwards. Bear in mind that christians do not require for themselves that the facts supporting the divinity of Christ should be proved beyond a reasonable doubt ; all that they require is enough proof to raise a hope, enough proof to rouse faith in spite of doubt. If you intend to persuade christians who believe in the divinity of Christ to give up their belief you must show them that their belief is so absolutely unsupported by reason and fact that there is no room even for hope.

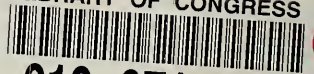
But let us suppose that you have accomplished this. Let us suppose that you have investigated and decided all the questions of exegesis, the comparison and history of manuscripts, the history of those ages, the conflict of testimony and all the other difficulties. The hardest part of your work is still before you. You will have to answer those christians who say, " Very well, we grant you that there was no resurrection, that there were no miracles, that Christ was not divine in that sense. But from the plainest and admitted facts of his life we see sufficient divinity in him to satisfy us. He was unlike any man the world

has ever heard of. He was better than any man the world has ever heard of. He founded the greatest religion. The stories about his miracles and resurrection may be inventions of credulous followers, but his life and words and influence are enough. Call him inspired or a genius or any name you like. But if the word divine means God-like then he was divine." You will find some difficulty I think in confuting these christians.

But suppose you have reduced Christ to the dimensions of an ordinary man. A man of luck, of accident, or of destiny I suppose you will call him. Or perhaps you will call him an imposter. Then you will still have to account for the effect of his influence ; you will have to explain how it was that an imposter introduced into the world new ideas and noble ideas. You will have to explain why intelligent men are still inspired by him, how it happened that such a person was the author of the Sermon on the Mount, for I believe you admit the beauty and truth of that production. You will have to prove that the various forms of christianity which are the result of his teaching have been and are a positive evil, or that we would be better off without them. Do not tell us about cruelties and intolerance and illogical dogmas which we agree with you in condemning. Do not bother with the conflicting opinions of sects and schools, but strike at the result and influence of Christ's work, strike right at the heart of christianity ; that is the place to aim ; why waste time chopping off fingers and toes. Show us that our religion is useless or an evil in every day life, in its practical effect as administered in the churches.

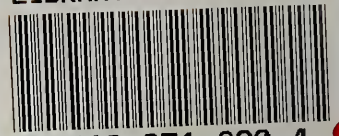
When you have done all this you will, doubtless, have succeeded in destroying christianity.

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